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SUBJECT: Disaster Relief Update - Focus on Partnerships for Reconstruction

REF: 09 SAN SALVADOR 1057; 09 SAN SALVADOR 1081; 09 FTR 2512

¶1. Summary: According to a December 4 report prepared by the Economic Commission of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), El Salvador suffered nearly USD 240 million in damages and loss related to the November 7-8 rains caused by Hurricane/Tropical Storm Ida. 199 lives were lost as a result of the storm, and ECLAC estimates that 125,000 Salvadorans have been directly or indirectly affected, mainly in five rural departments. To-date, the USG has provided USD 1.4 million to relief and reconstruction efforts, including over USD 1.2 million in assistance from the DOD and SOUTHCOM. ECLAC estimates USD 343 million will be required for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected areas, more than half (USD 181 million) related to the reconstruction of roadways and bridges. While the GOES continues to request post assistance in restoring its bridge network, the USG country team was made aware of a recent IDB loan and Japanese cooperation that may help alleviate some of the immediate reconstruction needs. Post requests urgent consideration for additional reconstruction/mitigation funds. Subsequent high-level dialogue with the GOES should emphasize the need for the government to more quickly and effectively prioritize its reconstruction requests.
End Summary.

Disaster Update

¶2. In addition to the ECLAC report indicating USD 240 million in damages related to the November 7-8 rains, the GOES provided the following updated information, current for the week of November 23:

Deaths: 199

Missing: 76

In Shelters: 4821

Evacuated: 2614

Houses Totally Destroyed: 3003

Houses Partially Destroyed: 462

Houses in High Risk Areas: 1299

Bridges Destroyed: 43

Bridges Severely Damaged: 61

Highways Rehabilitated: 59

Highways in the Process of Rehabilitation: 70

Schools Damaged: 111

Clinics Damaged: or Destroyed: 25

Communities Affected by Damages to Potable Water Distribution:
500

Estimated Amount of Damages to Water Systems: USD 10 million

The departments most affected by the storm include: Cuscatlan, La Libertad, La Paz, San Salvador, and San Vicente.

USG Assistance

¶13. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has
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contributed USD 281,851 to the immediate relief effort, including emergency relief supplies, procurement of local non-food items, and transportation. OFDA supplies, which included items such as mattresses, hygiene kits, plastic sheeting, and water containers, have been distributed to affected areas. Further assistance being considered by OFDA focuses on the provision of water supply, temporary housing, hosting programs, livestock and improved livelihoods. A pending request from post for up to USD 15 million of anti-financial crisis stimulus funding could be pushed toward job creation in the areas affected by the rains, providing useful synergies across the program.

¶14. To date, USAID El Salvador is channeling small levels of existing resources from existing programs in health and education that support disaster response. The U.S. Military through SOUTHCOTM has provided over USD 1.2 million of assistance to the GOES for relief efforts, including delivering relief supplies to remote areas via helicopter, personnel, fuel, medical treatment (supported over 3000 people), and other transportation. Engineering teams have traveled throughout the country to assess damage to infrastructure, and humanitarian elements have worked to rehabilitate water wells, schools, and clinics. USD 7.4 million of equipment donated to the GOES through the 2008/2009 Foreign Military Sales Grant program has been mission critical to the relief effort, including trucks, heavy equipment, an ambulance, and radios. Subsequent SOUTHCOTM assistance will include previously scheduled events, such as MEDRETES, engineering exercises, and humanitarian assistance program projects that will be redirected toward the affected areas. Future FMS, FMF, and IMET activities can also be tailored to assist with reconstruction as needs are identified, prioritized, and validated.

¶15. Discussions continue on how USAID and SOUTHCOTM may be able to provide ongoing relief, buttress mitigation efforts and respond to requests from the government for financial support in the areas of infrastructure, transportation, agriculture, housing, and livelihoods.

¶6. In the days immediately following the disaster, President Funes requested USG assistance in providing temporary replacement bridges, specifically Bailey Bridges, to provide emergency restoration of lines of communication between rural areas and the markets for their agricultural production. During his recent visit to Washington, the Minister of Agriculture requested the expedited installation of Bailey Bridges to ensure that the current harvests of sugarcane and coffee would be able to make it to market before the end of March 2010. Recent conversations with the National Sugar Association indicate the sugar industry spent approximately USD 150,000 of its own funds to rehabilitate roads and construct bypasses around two large collapsed bridges on the costal sugarcane route, restoring transportation along this key corridor. Coffee producers, on the other hand, claim that road closures are still a major concern, especially in Santiago Texacuangos and the areas surrounding Lake Ilopango. Discussions held in donor coordination meetings indicate the possible availability of a quick-fuse International Development Bank loan of USD 20 million that could be quickly allocated to repairing or replacing damaged bridges. DOD personnel have told us that they do not have a stockpile of Bailey type bridges. Purchasing Bailey bridges and installing them is costly and not a short term (less than 6 months) solution.

Needed Funds for a Way Forward

¶7. Faced with a USD 343 million estimate for reconstruction, with even more needed for mitigation and risk reduction , post requests urgent consideration of additional funding streams that can be directed toward assistance for El Salvador. If additional

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funds are received, resources would be prioritized based on urgency of need. Prioritized needs include: (1) immediate relief commodities (food, water supplies, blankets, etc.) for affected families both in and out of shelters; (2) reconversion of shelters back into schools before the January 15, 2010 opening of school; (3) assistance to reestablish affected families into viable livelihoods; (4) temporary repairs to transportation/communication systems to allow economic activity to resume; (5) provision of long-term infrastructure works and (6) improvement of disaster mitigation capability of inexperienced GOES personnel at various levels of government.

¶8. With regard to disaster preparedness, disaster management strategies need improvement, especially at the executive level, where turnover related to recent change in government left a deficit of know-how and experience that hampered relief efforts. Job creation programs, led by the GOES and potentially funded by new anti-financial crisis stimulus money, could target income generating schemes in traditional high-risk areas. Additional funds, perhaps provided by DOD, could be used to purchase materials/equipment/training for reconstruction projects led by Salvadoran Army engineers and builders hired from affected areas with some US DOD planning, technical, and working level support. Branding this sort of U.S. assistance as "Reconstruction Through Partnerships" would generate currency in our public relations strategies.

Engagement with the GOES

¶9. USG assistance is being somewhat slowed by the lack of a decisive prioritization of needs on the part of the GOES. Ministers, mayors, and other state actors have reached out to Post to express their assistance needs, but in an uncoordinated manner. The President's Technical Secretariat is the lead organization in setting priorities and coordinating donor assistance and will meet with us later this week. We will press for a rank-ordering of priorities and avoidance of duplication of effort.

Comment

¶10. USG disaster assistance has had a significant, positive effect in El Salvador. Working together with the GOES, we have saved lives and improved the living conditions for survivors in the affected areas. With additional funding, we will be able to contribute to much-needed reconstruction and risk mitigation projects to further enhance El Salvador's disaster preparedness, while providing hope and opportunity for the victims of the floods. This is a Mission priority.

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